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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
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SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO - NORTH KIVU HUMANITARIAN
UPDATE

REF: KINSHASA 01137

SUMMARY

¶1. Despite sporadic clashes between various armed groups in North Kivu Province, and a generally tenuous security environment, humanitarian agencies have begun to survey previously inaccessible areas. Relief officials report varying patterns of displacement, with pockets of small-scale returns, areas of new displacement, and additional communities in need of emergency assistance. Relief efforts are ongoing in the Goma area, and USAID field staff note increased attention to vulnerable communities beyond Goma, plus initial progress in coordination among UN and humanitarian organizations. However, the unpredictable security situation continues to impede reliable access to affected populations and ongoing decision-making delays hamper critical preparedness activities in advance of further anticipated displacement. End summary.

POPULATION MOVEMENTS

¶2. UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report that some internally displaced persons (IDPs) are returning to areas of origin in pockets of eastern North Kivu province following a lull in major military activity. However, sporadic clashes have resulted in some new displacement in Rutshuru territory. In addition, several communities displaced since May and June further north in Lubero territory have yet to receive assistance due to general insecurity and unpredictable access.

¶3. Relief agencies reported as of late September varying degrees of population returns to Nyamilima and Vitumbi towns in the Rutshuru

area and to Sake in Masisi. An interagency assessment mission to Nyamilima September 17 cited three reasons for the initial returns: the departure from the area of troops loyal to renegade General Laurent Nkunda from the mixed Bravo Brigade; the start of the school year; and the beginning of planting season. On September 21, USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) field staff observed increased market activity in Sake following the withdrawal of Nkunda's troops three days earlier to positions three kilometers from the town (REFTEL). The vast majority of residents, though, had not yet returned. In contrast, the NGO German Agro Action (GAA) reported the return of 1,156 families to Vitsumbi from Kanyabayonga in the Rutshuru area.

¶4. Although UN reports indicate that Nkunda's troops have reportedly pulled back from some positions in Rutshuru and Masisi territories, thus allowing some populations to return, periodic clashes between Nkunda, pro-government, Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR), and Mai-Mai troops continue to uproot communities in Rutshuru area. A mid-September rapid assessment by the NGO Solidarites identified the arrival of 4,800 displaced families in Kabaya from Inkokwe following fighting between Nkunda and pro-government elements. Solidarites is planning additional assessment missions to verify the size and needs of the displaced population and to determine appropriate response activities.

¶5. In southern Lubero territory, a preliminary assessment by GAA identified 6,010 families, or approximately 30,050 people, who are living with host communities and have yet to receive humanitarian assistance since being uprooted by fighting in May and June. The GAA team met with local officials and IDP representatives between September 18 and 20 and estimates that 2,586 families in Luofu, 1,061 families in Kamandi, and 2,363 families in Kanyabayonga require immediate assistance. Armed conflict and banditry have

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obstructed access and prevented sufficient relief efforts to date.

RESPONSE EFFORTS

¶6. Relief activities are ongoing for displaced populations from Masisi and Rutshuru territories in Goma-area settlements. The UN World Food Program, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Solidarites, Caritas, and the International Medical Corps are providing emergency relief supplies and essential food, water, sanitation and hygiene, health, nutrition, and protection services for more than 13,000 families near Goma. Solidarites is preparing to construct latrines and distribute relief commodities for 2,114 displaced households in Mushaki, Masisi territory, on September 25 and 26.

¶7. While coordinated response efforts are addressing priority needs of IDPs currently in the Goma area, government authorities and the humanitarian community have yet to identify additional sites for the current and potentially growing IDP population. An unknown number of families originally from the Rutshuru area, temporarily displaced to a settlement in Munigi, are now distributed between the Munigi area, Bulengo camp 15 km west of Goma, and an unofficial site between Bulengo and Goma. Occasional skirmishes in the Masisi and Rutshuru areas, plus anticipated continued conflict, indicate a need for additional preparedness activities, including the identification of possible new settlement areas.

¶8. The government has approved the expansion of the Bulengo site to 15 hectares, increasing the physical capacity of the camp to up to 15,000 people. UNHCR appears hesitant, however, to exceed 12,000 people at Bulengo, and relief agencies agree on the need for additional sites. As of September 24, a representative from the Ministry of Regional Integration stated that local officials are in the process of documenting the need for additional sites, a process required to begin identifying possible locations.

¶9. Regarding response efforts to displaced, vulnerable, and conflict-affected populations beyond the Goma area, OFDA field staff

note that UN and NGO agencies are beginning to conduct needs assessments and evaluate security and humanitarian conditions where access allows. As of September 21, several interagency and NGO teams were planning visits, or in the process of visiting, Kichanga, Mweso, Kalembe, Mushaki, Masisi, and Sake in Masisi territory; Kabaya in Rutshuru territory; and Minova in South Kivu province. While tenuous security and banditry continue to hinder reliable access and limit humanitarian response efforts, these initial assessments will prove useful in identifying potential relief activities if security and access permit.

¶10. To support additional response and preparedness efforts, OFDA has arranged for the purchase and transport of emergency relief supplies for 100,000 people, scheduled to arrive in Goma beginning September 24. The supplies include blankets, plastic sheeting, water containers, kitchen sets, soap, and biscuits, and will be provided to UNICEF for distribution to affected households.

COORDINATION

¶11. Humanitarian coordination has begun to improve following a clear division of activities between UNHCR and other UN agencies and NGOs. Earlier overt tension at the daily coordination meetings has diminished, and all operational UN and NGO agencies are in the process of developing a camp coordination and management strategy, facilitated by a visiting UNHCR representative from Geneva.

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¶12. On September 21, OFDA staff engaged in a frank discussion with the UNHCR country representative on the source and impact of recent infighting within the humanitarian community in Goma (REFTEL). OFDA staff also urged UNHCR to take the necessary steps to speed up the process of identifying and approving additional settlement sites and recommended that UNHCR review its rapid response capacity, including rapid funding mechanisms and partner relationships. The UNHCR representative indicated plans to reinforce significantly the Goma team with additional staff from Kinshasa, and the Geneva delegate announced the reorganization of the Goma-level UNHCR team at the September 24 coordination meeting. OFDA staff encouraged the UNHCR representative to be mindful of the impact of different distribution methods on individuals' decisions to stay at settlement sites or return home.

¶13. COMMENT: While the decision to divide responsibilities along camp lines has led to reduced tension among relief agencies, OFDA staff note that the resulting switch to more camp-based registration and commodity distributions at Bulengo may encourage non-displaced families from nearby areas to set up huts at Bulengo in order to receive assistance, and may further discourage displaced households from returning to areas of origin when security conditions improve.
END COMMENT.

BROCK